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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001143

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT INTIMIDATION AND PREEMPTIVE ARRESTS
SHUTDOWN LABOR PROTESTS

REF: A. HARARE 1130

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Eric T. Schultz under Section 1
.5 b/d

Summary and Action Request

¶1. (C) Government preemptive actions forestalled a series of planned protests by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions' (ZCTU) on Wednesday, September 13. Over 100 ZCTU members were detained and police reportedly severely beat several union leaders. The government press called the ZCTU protests a failure that revealed the opposition's lack of public support. The independent press, by contrast, focused on the government's brutal tactics, which it characterized as a sign of weakness and fear. The British and Canadian governments have already publicly condemned the GOZ's actions. We strongly recommend that the USG do so as well (see proposed statement in paragraph 5). End Summary.

Government's Unyielding Repression

¶2. (C) The GOZ went to extraordinary means to prevent the protest marches from occurring. These included the use of state-run media in the days leading up to September 13 to discourage participation with threats of violence, Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) threats to ZCTU members, and preemptive arrests throughout the country of key civil society activists (Ref A). Mlamleli Sibanda, the ZCTU spokesman, told us that several district organizers felt compelled to resign their duties in advance of the protest because they had been threatened. Sibanda added that the ZCTU's organizer in Chitungwiza, a suburb of Harare, was too

afraid to protest because of police surveillance outside of his office.

13. (C) On the morning of September 13, the police placed roadblocks throughout Harare and a heavy police presence was assigned to downtown Harare, where the March was to begin. Police in Harare and elsewhere subsequently arrested union leaders and followers at their gathering places before the marches could begin. Over one hundred individuals were arrested throughout the country, including 34 in Harare alone. Most of the senior leadership of ZCTU, including ZCTU President Lovemore Matombo and ZCTU General Secretary Wellington Chibebe were arrested. Lawyers for the two men told us their clients were beaten unconscious while in detention and suffered broken bones. They were reportedly initially denied medical attention but, though still under detention, have since been transferred to Harare Central hospital.

Aftermath and Lessons Learned

14. (C) The government press, conveniently ignoring the GOZ's extraordinarily harsh measures and making no mention of the abuse, trumpeted the failure of the protests as evidence of the lack of popular support for the ZCTU and opposition in general. The Zimbabwe Independent, on the other hand, characterized the events as a pyrrhic victory for the government. The Independent article said &the ZCTU succeeded in laying bare the ZANU-PF government's insecurity and its mortal fear of 'what might just happen.'8

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Opposition leaders told us that the failed protest might provide &lessons learned8 for future opposition actions. In particular, ZCTU's announcement of the protests two weeks in advance may have given the government too much time to employ counter measures.

Proposed Statement

15. (SBU) The Canadian and British governments have already issued statements condemning the GOZ's action. We recommend that the U.S. do so as well. We would propose that AF Assistant Secretary Fraser issue a statement along the following lines:

On September 13, the Zimbabwe Council of Trade Unions (ZCTU) planned to hold demonstrations throughout Zimbabwe to demand living wages, access to Anti Retro Virals (ARVs), and democratic space for civil society. The Government of Zimbabwe responded with a repressive series of actions, included the arrest of over 100 individuals, including ZCTU leaders, to forestall the protests. Many of those arrested, including senior leaders of ZCTU, were severely beaten and in some instances, denied access to lawyers and to medical treatment. This action follows government suppression on September 11 of a demonstration by Women of Zimbabwe Arise! that resulted in the arrest of over 100 women, some with babies, and some of whom were pregnant.

The U.S. Government strongly condemns the Government of Zimbabwe's denial of its citizens right to peacefully assemble and to petition their government. We further condemn the violence used to suppress the planned marches and call for the immediate release of those detained.

Comment

16. (C) In the aftermath of last week's successful MDC protest march, the GOZ could be expected to take severe steps to

prevent the ZCTU marches from occurring and contributing to growing opposition momentum. In the event, the GOZ succeeded in preventing the protests but we would agree with the Independent's analysis that they did so at a price, especially given the brutal tactics deployed. The GOZ's actions have resulted in growing international condemnation, to which we should add our voice. More importantly, we also agree that the GOZ's overreaction was a sign of weakness and served to reveal the extent to which the senior leadership fears public opinion. Left to their own devices, it is entirely possible that the ZCTU leadership's lack of organization and planning would have resulted in a damp squib,⁸ as the government mouthpiece the Herald has characterized the planned protest. However, the GOZ apparently did not believe it could afford to take that chance.

SCHULTZ